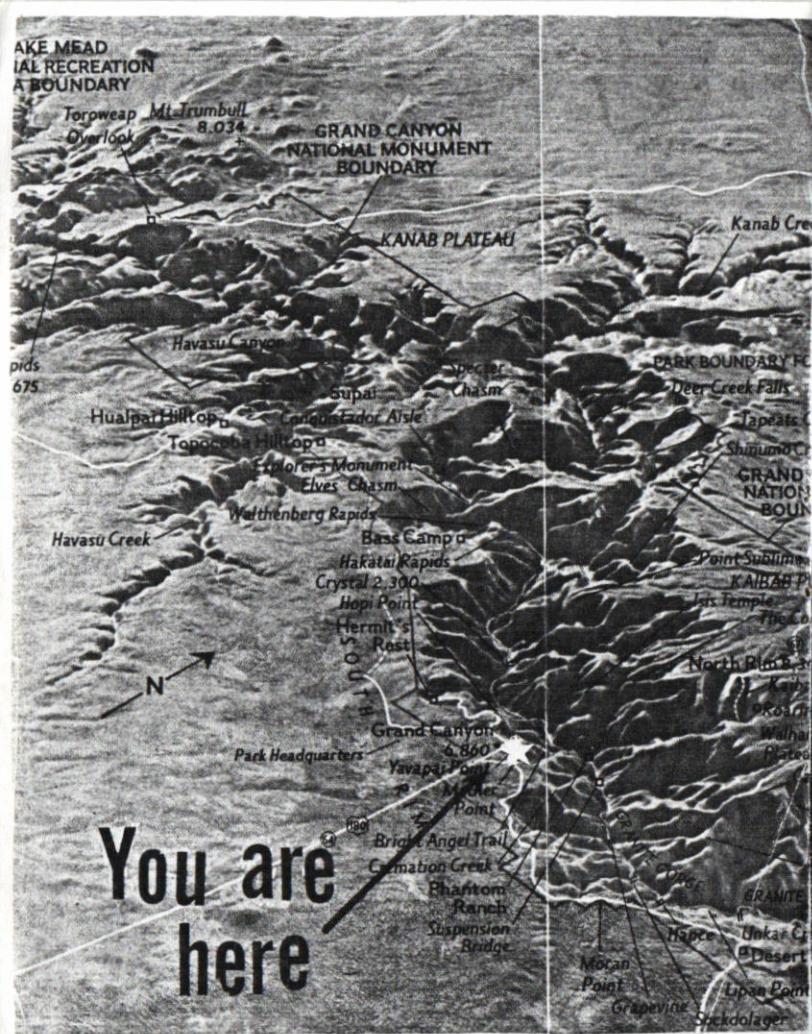


edges

emily PO Box 8366 Ann Arbor, MI 48107



This is totally self-indulgent.
I'm not as excited now that
I'm almost finished as I
was when I started. But
this is immediate. It's as
real as it will ever be.

Thanks to John for drawings,
encouragement & inspiration
& to Ian for many copy hook-ups
& tolerating my mess during
the making of this.

♥ EMILY (Oakland, CA)
Feb. 1998

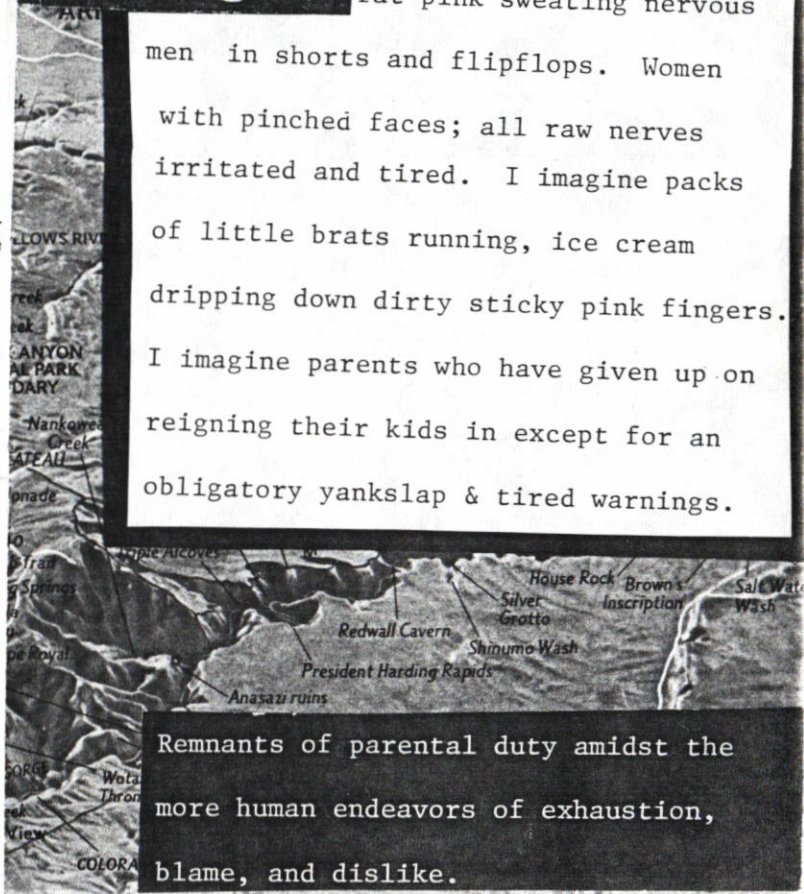
P.S. Thanks to anyone who
actually read this far.

It takes on a new meaning



It has become fleeting.

men in shorts and flipflops. Women with pinched faces; all raw nerves irritated and tired. I imagine packs of little brats running, ice cream dripping down dirty sticky pink fingers. I imagine parents who have given up on reigning their kids in except for an obligatory yankslap & tired warnings.



Remnants of parental duty amidst the more human endeavors of exhaustion, blame, and dislike.

So there you are,

at the Grand Canyon.

Seen the postcards & the pictures, it's
a goddam national tourist attraction,
so, okay, there you are.

Thought it'd be nice for the kids &

Hey, I never got to see it when I was young-

So....

The boundaries of my
experience

shrink back to ordinary proportions
once the possibilities of enlargement
recede,

shrinking in the back window
into specks on the horizon.

And that can be
as real or unreal
as I want
it to be.

It doesn't even have
to be connected to
that massive reality
in any tangible
sense.



With every other Mr. & Mrs. Smith in
the goddam country &

some Rodriguezes too cause



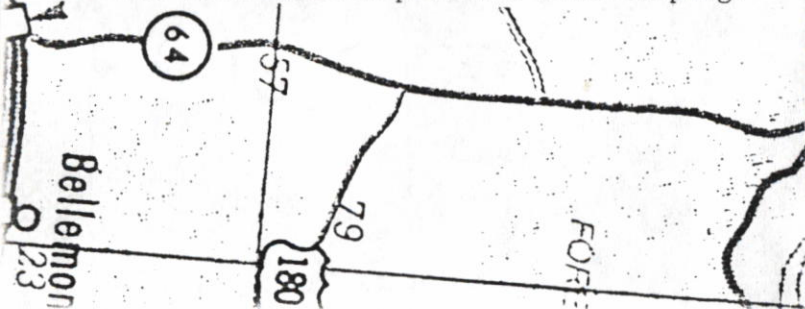
Hell, we're in the Southwest,

what did you expect?

OLD SMOKY PANCAKE HOUSE

& everyone piles into the station wagon, grumbling, & you head into town to hit the pancake house, but even though they have 4 different kinds of syrup, you can't do more than pick at the food. And then it's off to Yosemite for more tourist photos & some camping.

Williams



But she does not wield it.
It's not mystery or majesty,
but massiveness.

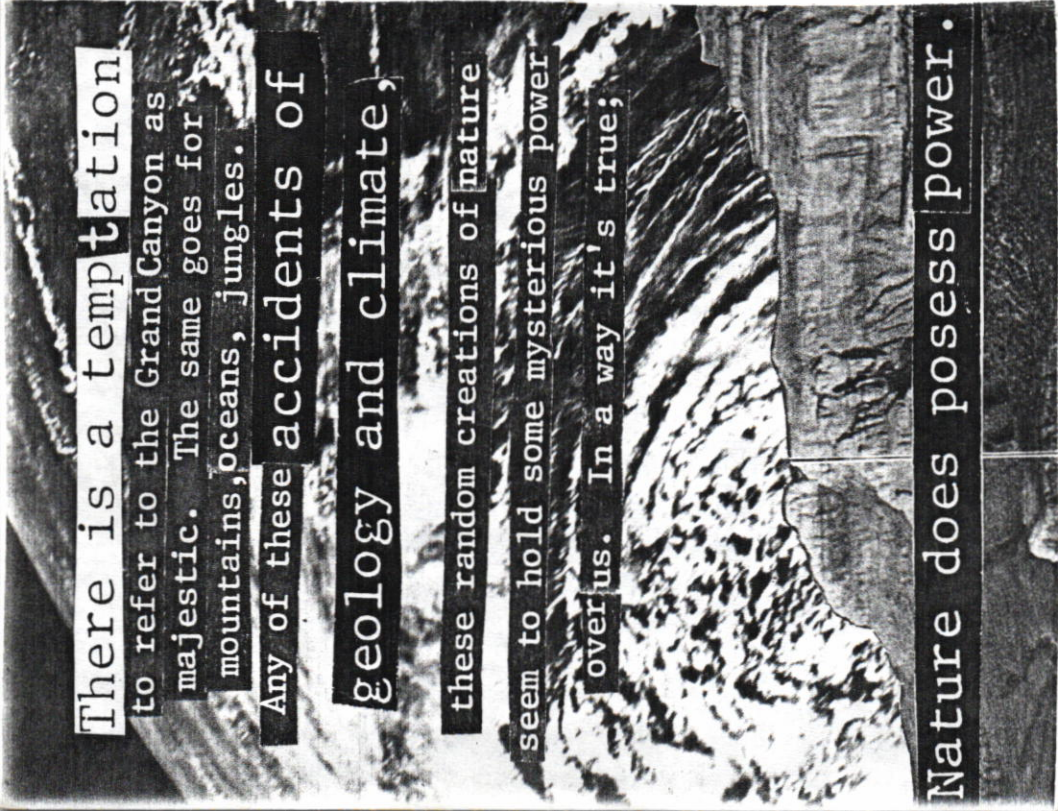
The sheer force of existence. The
undeniable power of permanence.

It's hard to believe
something that real.

That's where the mystery comes in;
our brains' inability to accept the
uncompromising truth of the land.

We are filled with wonder for this
thing that is so unlike ourselves.

Our tallest buildings are dwarfed,
our largest ships are drowned.



There is a temptation

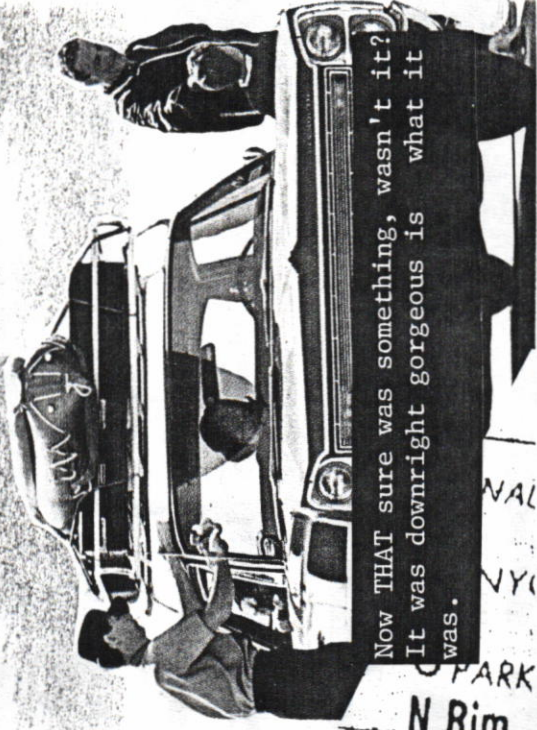
to refer to the Grand Canyon as majestic. The same goes for mountains, oceans, jungles.

Any of these accidents of geology and climate,

these random creations of nature seem to hold some mysterious power over us. In a way it's true;

Nature does possess power.

And you feel a little silly, a little melodramatic & so you cheer yourself up & real chipper you say



Now THAT sure was something, wasn't it? It was downright gorgeous is what it was.

N Rim

And when you get home,



you'll show your slides & tell everyone what a wonderful vacation it was and



Wasn't it

just a hoot

the way Jimmy

dropped his



ice cream over the edge?

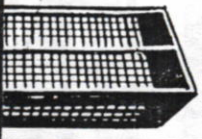
& it's not gravity playing tricks on us, either.

It's a self-contained fascination with our own impermanence.

We build

huge

monuments



to our selves

to counterbalance our mortality.

Structures, which, in the end, only reinforce our suspicions that our lives are insignificant and temporary.

Giant Oppressive
Box of Sealed
Glass and Metal

There goes the reality
of an entire city back
into the hands of the
odyssey. Completely
new world of any era
no on earth. Imagined
by on earth. Imagined
people, paid for by

Little corporations.
Give it a janky
name and sounding
excitement and watch
small profits at the
man-made object
might just. Perhaps
good like to try.

\$4.98



So we get to that edge.

We sidle up right next to it
& all of a sudden we're not safe.



& it's not some
invisible THEY that's
putting us in danger.



Not the pinko commies,

not aliens,

not the national deficit.

Just our own curiosity and the nagging
urge to succumb to gravity's
persistent tug.

It's the same feeling we get from rooftops and
bridges.

& someone will pipe up with

That's what

I call

too close

for comfort

THAT'S WHAT I CALL TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT

& your face will freeze,

just for a second
while you remember.



& then you'll give

a little nervous laugh and say

Oh nonsense,

it was beautiful.

This is how I imagine



most family vacations

but moreso at the Grand Canyon.

Like watching Trainspotting.



on their death bed.

Or
someone

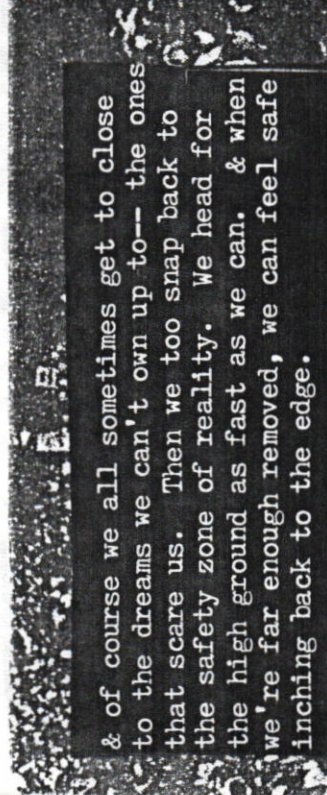
Or feeling your pulse



quicken at the thought
of kissing someone of the
same sex.



Or going to the Grand Canyon.



& of course we all sometimes get to close to the dreams we can't own up to-- the ones that scare us. Then we too snap back to the safety zone of reality. We head for the high ground as fast as we can. & when we're far enough removed, we can feel safe inching back to the edge.

Some of us seek out the edges, thrive on ambiguity. Some get stuck on or very near them (some of these develop paranoia or manic-depression). Some dive over & get just as far away on the "other" side as the most rigid realists on "this" side. But each of us lives with them, within them, between. And every once in a while we get reminded of them.



It's the edge that does it.

The edge of the Canyon-- it's too close for comfort. Too easy to step off. Sure there's a fence, but what's a fence but mean in this context? Flimsy & small & ridiculous against massive rock/clay/earth.

It's too reminiscent of the edges of & in our lives. The edges, the lines that become more hazy the closer we get to them. Like the way the cliffs are really a series of jutts & drops, stacks & layers, rather than the sudden wall of rock we think of when we picture cliffs.

But that's not the way it happened.

Some of the edges are more desirable than others.

For instance, most people try to live as close to the dreamworld boundary as possible. We dart back and forth between impulse & rationale, wish fulfillment and reality acceptance.

But there are those that can't even deal with that one. For them, even the most ordinary dreams/impulses (masturbation) are cause for distress.

They constantly have to anchor themselves to the mundane, to the point that eventually, out of necessity, they convince themselves that their realities & their dreams are exactly equivalent.

They want no more than they already have.

We drove up in what seemed like the middle of the night, even though it was really only 9:00. Since it was winter, the park was officially closed, which only means you can drive in without paying the \$20 car fee & there's no rangers. & it was just 4 kids-- 19-22 years old. & we didn't take a single picture. & we hadn't even planned on going; it was just a detour on our way across the country. & there was nothing to see yet but a whole bunch of blackness. & John & I slept outside on a path right next to the canyon and a pile of snow. & John said he thought the sounds of our orgasms filled up all the silence of the night, but I thought no way-- nothing could fill that void. & I fell asleep looking at the stars & listening for coyotes. & we woke up at dawn with frost on our tarp & the shivers & the most surreal view I have ever seen.

It was dawn at the Grand Canyon and we were standing at the railing with the other three tourists and Bec was conducting the sunrise.

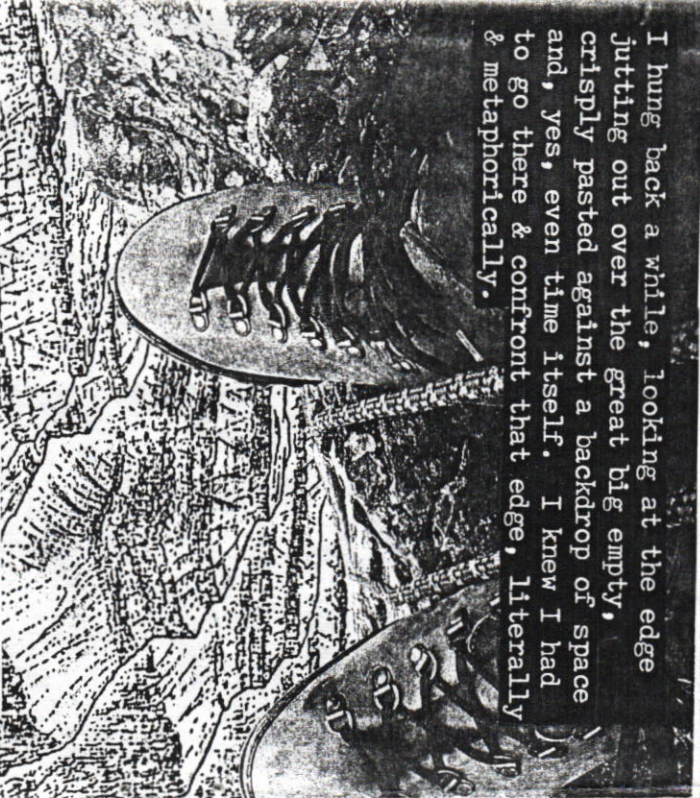
"The most
amazing
symphony

I've ever heard."

I wanted to climb over the fence; instead I ran away. Down the path, away from human contact. I stopped at another railing - not good enough. I kept going. Up a hill, around a cluster of trees. And then I found the spot I'd been looking for. A small outcropping, forming a point with a wide-angle view.



I hung back a while, looking at the edge jutting out over the great big empty, crisply pasted against a backdrop of space and, yes, even time itself. I knew I had to go there & confront that edge, literally & metaphorically.



So I sit there as close to the edge as I can. I sit there with my mouth hanging open, slack-jawed, resisting the temptation (but savoring it nonetheless) to reach out for it, to grab for it, to embrace it or be embraced by it; to make it all real.

There can
be no definition
with
out contrast

& if the edges don't
exist, if they are
variable, if contrast is
only a matter of degree,
our separate realms
lose meaning.

The edges of our lives are the boundaries between states of existence:

between the present and our memories, between our sense of security and our fears, between our dreams and our mundane realities, between the sane and the insane. The edges seem sharp and clear until we are upon them. Only then do we realize how they blur. How they sway & swirl & sometimes disappear altogether. When we back away, their outlines snap back into focus. When we back away, we try not to think about the ambiguities of the edges. It makes us doubt the solidity of where we stand. Every time we witness that ambiguity, we lose some small amount of faith in the seeming concreteness of our illusions.

Because eventually, that's all it is: illusion. We fool ourselves into believing that much more astutely in our definitions & boundaries.

I look down over the edge & will the images to come: the infinite variety of directions, positions, points of impact as my body fell ledge to ledge. Sinking into hypercolor surreality. No edges, just blurs and streaks & all that quiet filling up my whole head. Silenced doing somersaults until, with gravity's help, it turns to whistle-shrieking.

It comes like a revelation that this place has people fooled. Then the realization that it's the people who have themselves fooled.

Nature doesn't try, it just happens.

Like all that silence.

And it is easy to slip into a parallel universe. There are so many of them: worlds of the insane, the criminal, the crippled, the dying, perhaps of the dead as well. These worlds exist alongside this world and resemble it, but are not in it.

-Susanna Kaysen, Girl, Interrupted